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ABSTRACT

A learner's awareness of success, failure, and error potential encountered in free speech in a second language was studied with three subjects. The speech of adult learners of English as a Second Language was recorded and replayed to the subjects, who were asked to listen to their utterances and to recall the mental experience that surrounded each utterance. The subjects were asked to use categories to aid in recalling and characterizing their metalinguistic awareness during speech. Recording and self-analysis were carried out on a weekly basis for 10 weeks. A search was then made for grammatical structures that appeared frequently throughout the data. Each example was checked for progress over the 10-week period in the hope of discovering whether a growing awareness of error preceded mastery of the structure. Among the findings are the following: (1) the learners did not recognize 65 percent of their errors, even with the aid of the tape recorder and time for reflection; (2) when the subjects did identify and attempt to correct an error, they were successful in that correction 89 percent of the time; (3) there was a significant difference between learners' recognition of errors while speaking and their recognition of errors upon hearing the tape; and (4) awareness of error just before or just after the moment of speaking resulted in only 8 percent improvement in performance. (SW)

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AN INSIDE VIEW OF INTERLANGUAGE

Karen Schlue

In recent years the primary approach to the study of the learner's evolving system has been the analysis of errors found in the learner's speech and writing. The proponents of error analysis have claimed to know the origins of the errors found in learner text and have inferred from them certain strategies of learning. It is possible, however, that one might want to look beyond the error when we have at hand a second source of information. That is, just as a linguist may use 'native-speaker intuition' regarding the grammar of that speaker, so we might consult the second language learner about the nature of his Interlanguage. The intuitions of the language learner about his strategies and the possible source of his errors might be informative.

A number of researchers have looked at learners' judgment of the grammaticality of specific structures (e.g., Schachter et al, 1976). Robbins (1976) elicited learner judgments on the grammaticality of compositions they had written; she also asked for learner intuition as to the source of the errors identified. Covitt & Stafford (1976) tape-recorded students as they orally corrected their compositions. They found some learners who claimed to rely on grammatical rules to correct their errors (even though they frequently possessed more misconceptions than correct notions of English rules), and other learners who reported to rely on the improved 'sound' of their corrections, although one of these 'it-sounds-better' learners stated his belief that learning rules is crucial to language learning.

The awareness of errors and error potential is discussed by Johnston (1972) as being one of the phenomena she observed while immersed in a French-speaking environment. She identified five stages in the process of gaining oral control over a given grammatical structure:

1. Making an error and having no awareness of having done so.
2. Awareness of the error after having made it.
3. Awareness of the error beforehand, but being unable to avoid it and continue talking at the same time.
4. Awareness of an incipient error and correcting it in time.
5. Automatically choosing the correct form without thought (mastery).

It should be noted that Johnston is a linguistically sensitive person with an interest in second language acquisition; nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to think that she may not be unique among adult language learners.

Briefly, my research called for recording the speech of a number of adult ESL learners, and then asking them to listen to their utterances and to recall the mental experience which surrounded each utterance. The subjects were asked to use categories similar to Johnston's stages to aid in recalling and characterizing their metalinguistic awareness during speech. Recording and self-analysis were carried out on a weekly basis for ten weeks. A search was then made for grammatical structures which appeared frequently throughout the data. Each example was checked for progress over the ten-week period in the hope of discovering whether a growing awareness of error preceded mastery of the structure. This study, then, deals with oral second language production and the learner's awareness of success, failure, and error potential encountered in the course of speaking.

The research questions were:

1. Given some metalinguistic awareness, can the adult learner recall and describe what he experiences as he uses a second language.
2. Is there evidence for the existence of something resembling Johnston's stages.
3. Is there evidence from either the performance data or from the subjects' analysis of it to show that s/he is passing through stages during the time alloted for the study.
4. What is revealed by a comparison between the learner's actual oral output and his perception of it.

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METHOD

Subjects

The subjects to be reported on were: 1) a 35-year-old Iranian doctor working for a public health degree; 2) a Korean 18-year-old freshman who had immigrated here with her family; 3) a 34-year-old Venezuelan student working on an M.A. degree. All three were in an intermediate level ESL class at UCLA.

Procedure

Each subject met with the investigator once a week and discussed a topic of his choice for the first fifteen minutes of the session. For the next thirty to forty-five minutes, the subject listened to the taped conversations and commented on his own utterances. These self-analysis comments were tape recorded on a second cassette machine. Students were asked not only to find the errors but also to categorize their memory of the circumstances surrounding the utterance in question. They had a list of six categories to aid them:

1. There is no error here. All parts of this sentence are easy for me now.
2. There is no error. I almost made a mistake, but I corrected myself in time.
3. There is an error here. I knew it before I said it, but I didn't have time to correct myself.
4. There is an error here. I realized it immediately after I said it.
5. There is an error here. I just realized it now on hearing the recording.
6. I'm not sure whether this is correct or not.

Following this, as payment for the students' participation in the experiment, the conversation tape was replayed and correction of errors were given whether or not the subject had recognized them in his self-critique. The errors were explained for as long as the subject's stamina and level of interest held out. This usually lasted thirty to sixty minutes.

After each session, each sentence which the subject had analyzed was transcribed as well as the category he had assigned it and his comments about it (see Table 1).

RESULTS

First, these subjects seemed to monitor their speech quite carefully, but not for grammatical correctness. Their speech awareness was for the most part focused on their success or failure in conveying their message. Thus, they were very concerned with such things as the appropriatness of their lexical choices. Of course, their responses were mostly of a grammatical nature since they were constantly being reminded that we were looking for grammatical awareness. Yet even in the self-analysis activity, it was often hard to make the subjects focus on form rather than on lexicon and pronunciation. Often, in fact, it was obvious that they were not listening for grammatical success or failure at all, because they would embroider on their message rather than correct structural errors as they heard the conversation again. Later, when they saw their sentences written down, they found many errors which had gone unnoticed before. Whether this was because they were getting a third chance, or because of some inherent difference between reading and listening, or because the act of reading one's utterance written down somehow separates it from the discourse and hence from the importance of its message, is not clear.

Well over 1,000 errors were committed by the three subjects; these errors formed the data base. The total discovered by the subjects was 771, averaging 23 per session for two of the subjects and 31 for the other.

All three speakers heavily favored categories 1 and 5 in commenting on their errors. They declared their sentences were correct and contained no problems between 46 and 50% of the time. They discovered an error on hearing the tape between 24 and 40% of the time. Thus, categories 1 and 5 received 90% of the total judgments of Dr. F., 74% for Miss K., and 85% for Mr. S.

Knowing how often each category was chosen only scratches the surface, for we want to know how often a subject made an error and did not recognize it; made an error and did recognize it sooner or later, made and recognized an error but erred again in the correction of it; consciously avoided an error or corrected one ahead of

TABLE I TRANSCRIPT EXAMPLE

REF.	UTTERANCE	ERRORS	ANALYSIS	CORRECTIONS & COMMENTS
F.05.09	... the monument which is remained from the ancient history of Iran.	NO PLU NO PLU (verb)	# 5 # 5	monuments which are remained
F.05.10	Any tourist who comes to Iran come to visit Persepolis	T.P.S.	# 5	comes (ERhad to point out the problem. S used both bare and inflected forms several times, at random).
F.05.11	The expense of the municipality of Shiraz is very high.	O.K.	# 1	
F.05.12	They have to, uh, invite the most important, famous features at least for one night in a very great party.	LEX. (#7) X PREP (#7)	# 1	

TABLE II. Utterances receiving CATEGORY # 1 judgments

	WEEK →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	%
UTTERANCE TOTALLY CORRECT	FARSI	3	3	1	3	2	3	1	3	1	4	15%
	KOREAN	4	5	6	6	7	8	7	3½	3*	9	48%
	SPANISH	--	3	1	3	6	7	--	1*	3	--	25%
UTTERANCE CONTAINS AT LEAST ONE ERROR	FARSI	14	10	25	12	4	20	14	14	11	8	85%
	KOREAN	8	7	9	4	10	7	6	6½	5*	3	52%
	SPANISH	4	8	6	6	10	14	4	8*	12	--	75%

time; was completely correct and knew it; or was correct but thought an error has been made.

Table 2 shows that the subjects frequently were not successful in locating errors; they chose category 1. As can be seen in the table, when Dr. F., the Farsi speaker, said there was no error in a sentence he was right only 15% of the time over the ten-week period. However, 85% of the time when he felt there was no error, there actually was at least one error in the utterance. The Korean speaker was more successful than either the Farsi or Spanish speaker in locating errors.

For category 2 (the sentence is correct but only because I was aware of a potential error and fixed it in time), there was only one ocassion where a subject declared he had avoided or fixed an error when, in fact, the finished product was less than perfect. Other than this one failure, every time the subject used category 2,the portion of the sentence to which they were referring was, indeed, error free. However, subjects claimed this category for only 2% of the utterances considered.

Before exploring the use of categories 3, 4, 5, all of which indicate error awareness, we need to note a kind of behavior which appears to be an unconscious manifestation of category 4 (the immediate recognition of an error). A subject's conscious choice of this category meant that he realized he had made an error just after he made it. Sometimes there was direct evidence of this on the tape; i.e., the subject stopped and repaired his utterance: "Because the class on - at noon take a lot of time." Interestingly, there are many instances where the subject immediately repaired their errors, and the number of times those repairs went unremembered and unnoticed during self-analysis. 7.2% of the total errors committed received immediate corrections; however, over half of those immediate corrections were unnoticed later.

The overall rate of success in attempting to correct errors once they were recognized was 89%. (Subjects were somewhat more likely to be successful with immediate attempts. There were 304 later corrections during self-analysis of which 90% were successful.) In contrast, corrections made in the stream of speech were only 6% correct.

Table 4 shows the weekly tally of successful correction of errors that were recognized. Good corrections made up the vast majority of responses in categories 3, 4, and 5. For example, in his third session, Dr. F. said::"I consulted this morning to a physician and take an appoint day for upper GI serie." When he heard this,he changed take to took and called it category 5. This was considered a good tense correction, even though lexical items remained incorrect. Weekly good correction percentages are represented in Figure 1. As can be seen, there is no clear indication that overall error sensitivity either increased or decreased for these subjects in the ten-week period. In fact, the subjects, in addition to successful and unsuccessful corrections, identified and corrected errors where no error had been committed. However, such reverse correction occurred infrequently.

The 'not sure' category, category 6, was used in only a small percentage of the subjects' responses. The Korean speaker was most prone to saying she was not sure of grammaticality,both when there really was an error and when there was not. However,she also made the fewest bad corrections of real errors, and the most good corrections of real errors.

The last type of behavior to be considered here is complete non-awareness of errors. Errors which went unnoticed both at the moment of speaking and during later self-analysis were redesignated as category 7 on the data sheets. Figure 2 shows the weekly percentages of unrecognized errors. As with the tally of good corrections, there is no clear indication of overall increase or decrease in the ten-week period. The ratio of unrecognized errors to all errors committed by these subjects is about 65 %.

As mentioned earlier, the data of each subject were searched for at least one grammatical structure or morpheme for which progress in error awareness and/or control

TABLE III. Immediate self-correction, noticed and unnoticed.

	TOTAL ERRORS	IMMEDIATE CORRECTIONS	% OF TOTAL	UNNOTICED IMMEDIATE CORRECTIONS	% OF ALL IMMED. CORRECT'S
FARSI	438	22	5.0%	11	50.0%
KOREAN	293	25	8.5%	13	52.0%
SPANISH	370	32	8.6%	20	62.5%

$$\frac{\text{Total immediate corrections}}{\text{Total errors}} \times 100 = 7.2\%$$

$$\frac{\text{Total unnoticed immediate corrections}}{\text{Total immediate corrections}} \times 100 = 55.7\%$$

TABLE IV. Percentages of successful error correction

WEEK→	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	AVERAGE
FARSI	17%	20%	20%	31%	50%	18%	34%	31%	40%	33%	29%
KOREAN	42%	41%	41%	38%	43%	54%	32%	16%* / 22	10%*	57%	40%
SPANISH	45%	21%	30%	27%	19%	21%	28%	6%*	29%	---	25%

$$\frac{\text{Total good corrections}}{\text{Total errors}} \times 100 = 31\%$$

* indicates data from imitation task

were observable. In searching for one structure which underwent change in the data of all three subjects, preliminary results indicated that an analysis of the use of the third-person singular present tense would be productive. By a more careful count, however, the sample size was reduced below a level which would permit inferences to be drawn. All that can safely be said about the third person singular is that the data from all three subjects suggested a trend toward increasing control of this morpheme when the subject of the verb was human.

The data from Dr. F. provided the only example of a grammatical concept which revealed growth in awareness in the ten weeks of this study, his use of plurals. First of all, whenever Dr. F. chose to use irregular nouns in the plural form, he was always correct. He did make errors in abstract contexts such as "The woman was not obliged to go to military service." However, this represents a gap in his knowledge of how to choose between singular and plural use, not a failure to mark intended plurality. When he recognized a need for a noun plural, and that noun was irregular, Dr. F. was always successful. This was not the case for regular noun plurals.

The most interesting results, then, are found in Dr. F.'s growing awareness of the necessity of marking regular noun plurals. As can be seen in Figure 3, there is a dramatic shift in the first five weeks from category 7 (error not noticed) to category 5 (heard the error while listening to tape). So there is at least this small piece of evidence that Dr. F. was, in fact,shifting from no awareness of error to a second stage of awareness on hearing the tape. He became very aware of the need to mark regular nouns for plurality. He spoke about the problem frequently; for example, "I try to concentrate that I should have no more error with my plural!" It is interesting that nearly all his successes occurred when the noun was not the subject so that no subject-verb agreement was involved. Perhaps the difficulty of getting both subject-verb agreement and noun plural marked at the same time accounted for his difficulty with noun plurals in subject position.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the following are the major statements about error awareness and correction during and following free speech in a second language which can be made in regard to the three subjects in this study.

1. These learners did not recognize 65% of their errors, even with the aid of the tape recorder and time for reflection. When they said their sentences were error-free, those sentences actually contained at least one error between 52% and 85% of the time.

2. When these subjects did identify and attempt to correct an error,they were successful in that correction 89% of the time.

3. There was a significant difference between the learners' recognition of errors while speaking (represented by categories 2, 3, and 4, plus those immediate corrections that went unnoticed) and their recognition of errors upon hearing the tape (category 5). In the first case, they identified about 25%. Recognition of errors, again, did not necessarily mean the subject could correct the error.

4. Awareness of error just before or just after the moment of speaking ("monitoring") resulted in only 8% improvement in performance.

These findings corroborate what language teachers have long observed: as the urgency of the need to communicate increases, the likelihood that the learner will pay attention to correctness of form decreases. While under pressure of conversation in the second language, these learners demonstrated little ability to attend to their grammar. These learners showed an overall capacity to correct about 45% of their errors. However, not even the atmosphere of this study (i.e., the knowledge that they were being taped, that an English teacher was listening to them, that they would have to confront their errors later on, etc.) could force them to correct more than 8% of their errors when engaged in conversation. Teachers who despair over their students'

inability to apply the rules learned in the classroom to their free speech may be relieved to know that there is, apparently, a limit to the application of conscious knowledge to communicative output.

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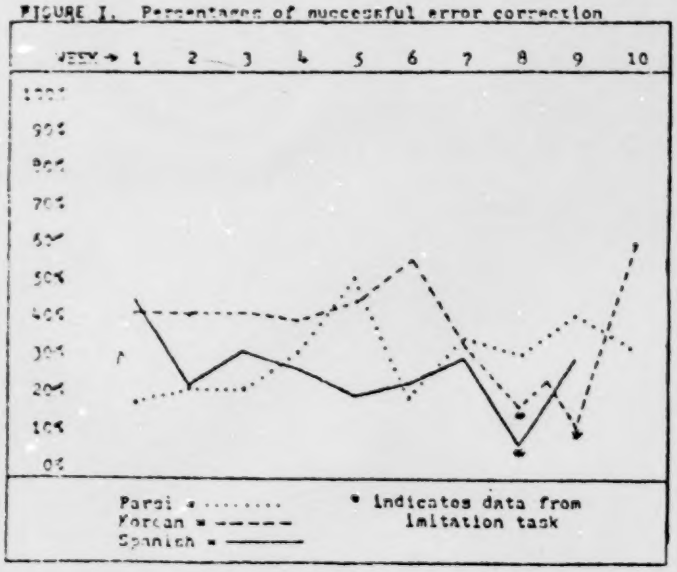
FIGURE I. Percentages of successful error correction



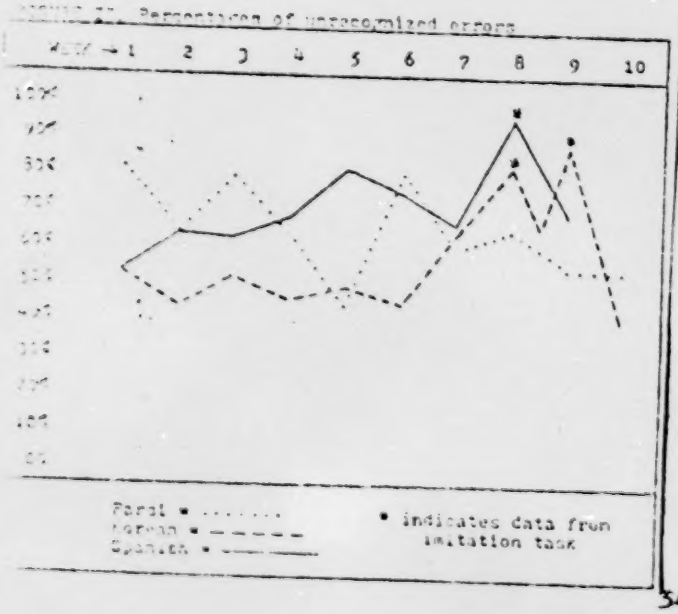


FIGURE III. Dr. F.'s Performance/awareness of regular noun plurals